

Middle School Initiative

**PART I
COVER SHEET**

CAP 4 SEMESTER 2 WEEK 2

COURSE: Public Affairs Officer Staff Duty Analysis, Achievement 10

LESSON TITLE: Writing an Article for Publication

LENGTH OF LESSON: 50 Minutes

METHOD: Lecture

REFERENCE(S):

1. CAPR 190-1, *Guide to Civil Air Patrol Public Affairs*, Volume I, Chapter 10, 1 May 00
2. CAPR 20-1, *Organization of Civil Air Patrol*, Part III, Page 39, 29 May 00
3. CAPP 201, *Public Affairs Officer Specialty Track Study Guide*, 15 Jan 00

AUDIO/VISUAL AIDS/HANDOUTS/ACTIVITY MATERIAL(S):

Handout 1 - Quick Guide

COGNITIVE OBJECTIVE: The objective of this lesson is to learn how to write an article for publication.

COGNITIVE SAMPLES OF BEHAVIOR: Each cadet will willingly learn how to write an article for publication.

AFFECTIVE OBJECTIVE: N/A

AFFECTIVE SAMPLES OF BEHAVIOR: N/A

Middle School Initiative

PART II TEACHING PLAN

Introduction

ATTENTION: How can you better inform the general public about CAP? What can you do about it? What can CAP do about improving the public knowledge of CAP?

MOTIVATION: The key officer, cadet or senior member, in getting the word out concerning the activity of Civil Air Patrol is the public affairs officer. Did you know that each member is a public affairs officer? Why is that true? Shall we find out?

OVERVIEW: In Achievements 9 through 16, staff duty analysis is part of the leadership training. This is the second lesson in this series on public affairs officer. We will learn the "How-To" of writing an article for publication in this lesson.

Body

Instructor's Note: Distribute Handout 1- Quick Guide to each student.

MP 1 Getting Your Story in the Newspaper. NOTE: Any news release sent to a newspaper, or which a reporter writes, is generally called a "story" or a "news story."

a. **Your Duty.** As a unit PAO, it is your duty to see that publicity about your unit, its personnel, and its activities appears regularly in your local newspaper. You have a positive "commodity" to sell--a non-commercial, public service-type activity--and the newspaper editor is interested in this type material if it is news.

b. **Timely News Leads.** Here is a partial list of CAP unit activities, which can usually be developed into timely news or feature stories:

1. The assignment of a new commander or staff officer.
2. Plans for new buildings.
3. Nominations and appointments to service academies (West Point, the Naval Academy, the Air Force Academy).
4. A CAP cadet joining one of the military services. (Check with the recruiter to avoid duplicate effort.)

5. Speaking engagements.
6. Selection of cadets for special CAP courses or selection of personnel for special schools, workshops, and scholarships.
7. All promotions.
8. Awards. (These can often generate two news stories--one announcing the award, and a second about the presentation, when it occurs.)
9. Announcing social events planned by the unit.
10. Announcing visits by VIPs (the National Commander, etc.)
11. Recruiting drives, sports events, drill competition, etc.
12. Announcing search and rescue or disaster missions, or test and practice missions.
13. CAP participation in community projects, such as parades and exhibits.

c. **Story.** There is another kind of story that has no "time" element; that is, it will make interesting reading anytime. Examples:

1. A famous figure or prominent citizen who is a member of the unit.
2. Entire families who are all members of CAP.
3. A historical story about how the unit has developed over the years.
4. Annual summary of unit's accomplishments.
5. Outstanding or unusual achievement by an individual member.
6. Any type of human-interest story.

d. **Know Your Newspeople.** You should know the important people on the staff of the local newspaper. First, know the person who is responsible for handling the news -- the city editors. Call on them but do not take up their time needlessly.

e. **Trust Your Newspeople.** Remember, the editors decide what is news as far as their paper is concerned. If they do not print something you have given them, then it just was not news to them--on that particular day--or there was limited space and your story was the one omitted. Do not expect all your releases to be published and do not question their judgment.

MP 2 How To Prepare News Releases. You must prepare your news release carefully, because it must be easy to understand and because it must first sell itself to the editor. The less rewriting or revising the editor has to do, the more likely it is that your story will get into print.

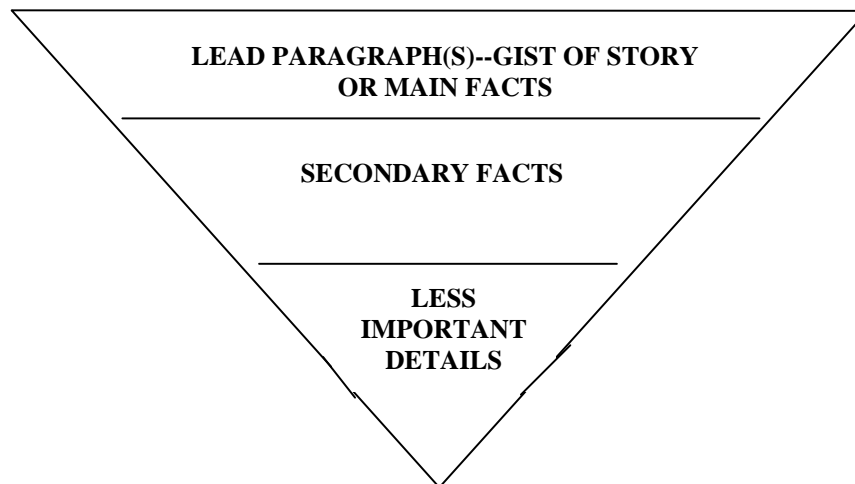
a. **Preparing News Releases.** Always follow these basic fundamentals in preparing your news releases:

1. Use standard size (8 1/2 x 11), white paper. Do not use legal length or other odd sizes or colors.
2. Use only one side of the paper, and double or triple space.
3. Put your name, address, and telephone number in the upper left-hand corner.
4. Put the date the story is to be released in the upper right-hand corner. Try to give a specific date or time.
5. Let the editor write the headlines. Do not try to do this for the editor.
6. Allow ample margins. Start a story about a third of the way down on the first page. This allows the editor space to write in the headline or other notes.
7. If you know it, try to make your story conform to the style of the paper for which you are writing, or to standard newspaper usage.
8. Confine yourself to facts. Keep the story as short as possible, but give all essential information.
9. Send only one copy of a news release to a particular paper--not to four or five staff members of the same paper.
10. If your are going to send your news story to more than one news outlet, then reproduce your story or type originals for each use. **DO NOT EVER SEND THEM CARBON COPIES** or clippings from some other publication.
11. Avoid the use of slang expressions, nicknames, or obscure abbreviations or trade jargon, which the general public may not understand.

b. **Writing the Release.** There is no specific formula for writing the perfect news story. However, there are basic techniques you should follow. For instance, keep your sentences short. Use short words. Use lots of words and phrases that have human interest. This formula is keyed to averages, but do not overlook an important point: Readability means variety. A long series of monotonous sentences makes deadly dull reading.

c. **The Inverted Pyramid.** American newspapers have generally adopted what is known as the "inverted pyramid" style of writing. This style is also followed in armed forces publications and in *The Civil Air Patrol News*. Under this system, is the top of the story or lead paragraph (the inverted apex of the pyramid). Most readers scan the news, skimming headlines and lead paragraphs. If the lead lacks punch or fails to draw their interest, they seldom read any further.

The inverted pyramid presents a news story on a scale of descending interest. In this way, the reader can get the meat of the story even if they read only the first paragraph. The inverted pyramid is also useful for trimming news stories. If the story has to be shortened, it is simple for the editor or makeup person in the composing room to cut off the bottom paragraphs or less important details to make the story fit the available space. The following diagram illustrates the inverted pyramid style of news writing.



d. **Writing Your Lead.** The lead is the most important single part of a news story and is usually the hardest to write. Generally, it requires extra thought and effort. Most good leads are written according to the following basic principles:

1. Tell the story in the opening paragraph (or first two paragraphs, if needed).
2. Keep leads short and simple, but get the main facts into them. Some papers use one-sentence leads; others allow two sentences. Check the style in your local papers.
3. Give your leads "punch" to create an impact on your readers and to hold their attention. Sometimes newspeople ignore the five W's and concentrate on grabbing the reader's interest with a "novelty" lead. CAP PAOs should be wary of using "novelty" leads and should generally stick to normal news style.

- A **PUNCH LEAD** is a blunt, surprising statement that jolts the reader and arouses curiosity. **EXAMPLE:** "A Civil Air Patrol plane was involved today in a three-car accident in San Francisco."

- A **QUESTION LEAD** aims at stimulating the readers' curiosity and leads them into the story. The question should be one that cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." Avoid question leads. **EXAMPLE:** "How much does it cost to join Civil Air Patrol?"

- **THE QUOTATION LEAD** can be effective only if it is eye-catching and pertinent. **NOTE:** Unless there is a truly significant quote in a speech, it is usually the lazy public affairs officer or reporter who will use a quote as a lead. The conscientious writer will boil down the facts and extract a significant summation for the lead.

- **THERE ARE OTHER** novelty leads, such as the contrast lead, which compares two opposites to dramatize a story. The comparison lead may be between war and peace, age and youth, tragedy and comedy, past and present, etc. There are picture and background leads, which are descriptive. The picture lead describes the person or object in the lead. The background lead gives setting or surroundings. Seven tests of a good lead are: brevity, conformance to the story, authoritativeness, interest, accuracy, freedom from your own opinion, and predominance of the important facts of the story.

e. **Writing the Release.** If your unit is involved in a search and rescue effort following a plane crash or other disaster relief mission, get the facts of your unit's participation to the news media immediately. Confine yourself to the facts concerning your CAP unit's endeavor, coordinate your releases with local civilian and/or military officials, and above all, **DON'T SPECULATE ON THE CAUSE** or other aspects of the tragedy that you don't know anything about. Many other rescue agencies are usually involved, so don't attempt to play up your story as if CAP were running the entire show.

Conclusion

SUMMARY: We have explored the way to write a news release and the different styles and CAP's role in getting the word out.

REMOTIVATION: A unit PAO should always seek ways to publicize the activities of their unit and the members in that unit. How many activities would you find within your unit that should be publicized? Can you help with letting the public know what your unit is doing and how to reach you? Of course, you can!

CLOSURE: The next Staff Duty Analysis class will be writing an article for publication. You will be given information about an event and then you will write the release.

Middle School Initiative

**PART III
LESSON REVIEW**

LESSON OBJECTIVE(S): The objective of this lesson was learn how to write an article for publication.

LESSON QUESTIONS: None